What People Think
about the
Unitarian Society
of Minneapolis
and its minister
John H. Dietrich

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What People Think

About the

UNITARIAN SOCIETY
OF MINNEAPOLIS

and Its Minister

JOHN H. DIETRICH

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FOREWORD

This booklet is issued for the purpose of bringing to the attention of the people of this community the splendid educational work, which is being done by the Unitarian Society of Minneapolis. To this end it consists of three parts: first, a group of opinions about its work expressed by people of intellectual discrimination; second, a short biographical sketch of its minister, John H. Dietrich; and third, a statement in regard to the purpose and methods of the organization.

This Society meets on Sunday mornings at the Garrick Theater at 10:30 o'clock, and Mr. Dietrich speaks at 11. Here all problems of public concern and human interest are treated with a candor elsewhere unknown, for the simple reason that freedom of expression is the very basis of its organization. One of its prominent members recently said: "We may not agree with every thing our minister says, but we stand ready to defend him in his right to say it." The Sunday morning program, including the address, is broadcast over WAMD (244 meters).

WORDS OF APPRECIATION

"I recall Mr. Dietrich's fine addresses. They were so searching and sincere—so full of the essence of wide reading and reflection, so disturbing and stimulating to self-thought that they were a rare education to me."

RICHARD T. LAHEY,
Artist, New York City.

* * *

"A considerable part of the delight of my visit to Minneapolis came from what I could so easily see of the remarkable character of your work and the response which it is receiving from the people who count in the best intellectual and spiritual sense of the word. I do not wonder that you are happy and confident of the future."

JOHN HAYNES HOLMES,
Minister Community Church, New York City.

* * *

"John H. Dietrich says what he thinks and thinks with unusual clarity and orderliness, making a rounded unity out of his every utterance, and holding exacting audiences that keep on growing."

The Christian Register,
Boston, Massachusetts.

* * *

"The Society has now for its minister John H. Dietrich, who unites with scholarship and power to think, a marked faculty for presentment, and who champions a broad faith, reverently but with uncompromising plainness. The church is packed Sunday after Sunday to capacity with a vigorous company, men and women immersed in the best life of the city, but craving each week the utterance of a message broad, human, uplifting . . . Here the timid, frivolous seekers for social prestige, those content with the ceremonial and spectacular husk without demand-

ing the kernel, do not find themselves at home. It is a place for the resolute, for the open-eyed, for those who pursue not shadows but the substance."

JAMES K. HOSMER,
Author and Historian.

* * *

"The statement that the Unitarian Society will hereafter hold services at the Auditorium, on account of the inadequacy of the present building, affords gratifying evidence of local appreciation for solid thinking and forceful finely phrased expression. Mr. Dietrich's addresses are meaty and rewarding. The listener that gives them the close attention that is their due and that they necessitate goes away enriched and invigorated. This success contains a hint for all preachers. It is that they give their congregations the strongest thought and the finest diction of which they are capable."

Editorial, Spokesman-Review,
Spokane, Wash.

* * *

"The example you always hold before us of a free mind playing upon a body of important material never fails to stimulate and inspire me."

F. M. RARIG,
Professor of Public Speaking.
University of Minnesota.

* * *

"I was greatly pleased with Mr. Dietrich's address. It was so free from any tincture of the odium theologicum and so rich in the modern scientifico-philosophical spirit, which is so much needed."

I. N. RUDDELL, M. D.,
Jeffersonville, Ind.

* * *

"I rejoiced to see the kind of church that is developing in Minneapolis under the leadership of John H.

Dietrich. Radical to the core, thoroughgoing in its rejection of every last vestige of theological and ecclesiastical practice, sustained by an alert group of men and women whose thought and public action are responsible for a good part of the best that is happening in the state, this church is a model of what the church of the future is certain to be. And it is inspiring to note that the institution is thriving beyond what is known by any other Unitarian church with which I am familiar."

Editor of "Unity,"
Chicago, Ill.

* * *

"Mr. Dietrich is an educator."

O. W. FIRKINS,
Professor of Comparative Literature,
University of Minnesota.

* * *

"Mr. Dietrich's address yesterday was remarkable. It was constructive because it provoked thought—thought that provokes action. That's what I call a great talk—one of the very best I have ever listened to."

R. O. FOSTER.
Foster and Waldo, Minneapolis.

* * *

"Mr. Dietrich's talks during the period I lived in Minneapolis were of more profit to me than all the inane preaching I have been exposed to in the last ten years. The reason is that he has the scientific attitude which permits him to speak in language that can be understood by ordinary people.

DONALD FOLSOM,
University of Maine.

"I have been standing wistfully on the edge of the liberal church for a quarter of a century waiting for Mr. Dietrich's message."

RUTH F. ALLEN,
Professor of Biology,
University of California.

* * *

"I know of no one who so courageously and truthfully and aptly states the case for the Modernist as Mr. Dietrich."

HORACE ELDON BURT,
Chicago, Ill.

* * *

"Mr. Dietrich seeks the truth and facts first, and lets the chips fall where they may."

JOHN M. EVVARD,
Professor of Animal Husbandry,
Iowa State College.

* * *

"While not a member of your society, I always enjoy the intellectual banquet you serve when I accompany Mrs. Gray occasionally to your Sunday morning services."

FRED L. GRAY,
President, Fred L. Gray Co.

* * *

"We are finding Mr. Dietrich very interesting and a man of great force. Naturally however his message has been a little disturbing to some, just as a pail of cold water on the back might be; for, as you know, he is an extreme Humanist."

CLAY MACAULEY,
Educational Adviser to the Japanese Empire.

* * *

"The addresses which Mr. Dietrich has been giving have filled the Berkeley church to capacity and have aroused an interest and enthusiasm comparable to that

of the oldtime Methodist revival. If we had the courage and the will to shake our minds free from the refined and rarified subjective supernaturalism and the attenuated mysticism that still confuses the thinking even of most liberal minds, I feel sure that under such leadership we could combine the intelligent element of our community into an organization that would be more effective in the various directions of humanistic endeavor than any church that Berkeley has ever known."

DR. S. M. AUGUSTINE,
Chairman Trustees,
Berkeley (Calif.) Unitarian Church.

* * *

"Our minister, Mr. Dietrich, alone is responsible for the large audiences in Minneapolis. He is the real answer to our large congregations and the surprisingly large number of men attending. He is a mild-mannered man, never rants, but talks simply and earnestly, exemplifying Wendell Phillip's ideal of oratory, "a gentleman conversing." His chief power is his intellectual equipment and his student habits. He has something to say every Sunday. The amount of erudition that he can bring to bear upon a subject is amazing. People come Sunday after Sunday, crowd the church, because they know they are going to hear something worth while. The sermon always lasts an hour, sometimes longer, never less."

H. B. GISLASON,
Formerly Asst. Professor of Public Speaking,
University of Minnesota.

* * *

"Mr. Dietrich is one of the really great preachers of this generation. He has intellectual honesty to which his courage is allied. He has the courage of his opinions and the courage to avow them and take the consequences. He speaks out what is in him

strong and clear, he has faith in truth—thinks it is better for the world than superstition. Mr. Dietrich is exerting a powerful influence and has already made a deep impression upon the liberal religious movement."

Rocky Mountain News,
Denver, Colorado.

* * *

"Mr. Dietrich certainly has the faculty of expressing liberal ideas in clear and convincing English."

CHARLES FRANCIS POTTER,
Executive Secretary,
Antioch College.

* * *

"After a careful review of the leading liberal preachers of today, I know of no greater one than John H. Dietrich. The secret of his power as a speaker has often been discussed by his hearers. After hearing him recently I felt that his brain is like a musical instrument that combines all the chords and his spirit is ever playing upon it.

"He is a profound student of modern science, and he finds in the facts of science vivid illustrations of his thought. He is also a student in literary and dramatic criticism, and few persons have a greater gift for tracing the intricacies of character and the unfolding of thought and sentiment in the literary masterpieces. But he is above all a theological and social and moral reformer—a veritable and unsparing iconoclast of superstitions and of formalities, however sacredly associated, from which the reason has departed.

"Wherever he speaks, whether in New York, Boston, or Minneapolis, those who flock to hear him are among the strongest, the most refined, the most moral, cultivated, and aspiring minds. They are drawn to him not only by the music of his voice, but by his

courage, incisive force, pureness of purpose and absolute intellectual integrity."

GEORGE GILMOUR in "Denver Express."

* * *

"Mr. Dietrich seizes the essential points of a theme, explains them in a clear manner, and then drives home his argument in a forcible and courageous way; and courage, I have come to believe, is the rarest of the virtues."

EDWARD M. HULME,
Professor of History,
Leland Stanford University.

* * *

"I feel that Mr. Dietrich is developing the liberal church in the direction in which it should go—in which it must go, if it is to have any real measure of success. I am more and more persuaded that he is finding that new method in religion which can make the liberal movement really effective."

WM. R. AMBERSON,
Professor of Physiology,
University of Pennsylvania.

* * *

"Mr. Dietrich is a great preacher and has the largest attendance of men of any congregation in the denomination. He scares some of the old timers, but we who know him understand him and only rejoice in his success."

ALBERT C. DIEFFENBACH,
Editor, Christian Register,
Boston, Mass.

* * *

"It was a joy to get in touch with the men of your church. I was enormously impressed by every one of those men whom I met, and full of rejoicing at the splendid forward-looking spirit which they manifested.

You must be doing a remarkable work to gather and hold such a following."

JOHN HAYNES HOLMES.

* * *

"I am surprised that Mr. Dietrich speaks to large audiences, because most people, even in the liberal churches, prefer a world of imagination instead of reality and truth."

H. L. FAIRCHILD,
Professor of Geology,
University of Rochester.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MR. DIETRICH

Mr. Dietrich comes of German-Swiss parentage, his ancestors having migrated from Switzerland to this country in 1710. They settled in the mountain region of central Pennsylvania, where Mr. Dietrich's boyhood was spent. He received his early education in a rural district school. At the age of fourteen he showed an eagerness for education, unusual in that community, and began his preparation for college at Mercersburg Academy, from which after three years of study he was graduated in 1896. From there he went to Franklin and Marshall College, from which he was graduated with high honors in 1900. After teaching two years in eastern preparatory schools, he decided to enter the ministry of the Reformed Church, in which he had been brought up. This particular denomination is an extension in America of the Zwinglian reformation, which took place in Switzerland at the same time as the Lutheran reformation in Germany. Mr. Dietrich prepared for the ministry at the denominational theological school at Lancaster, Pa., where he spent three years, graduating in 1905. He immediately assumed the pastorate of St. Mark's Reformed Church in Pittsburgh, Pa., where he remained for six years. During this period the seed which was sown during his college career began to bear fruit. His maturing mind accepted warmly the teachings of Darwin and Spencer, Huxley and Fiske, in which he found at last a satisfactory explanation of the universe, and a doctrine to lead and stimulate men along the highest paths. This however caused him to be very critical of many of the church doctrines, and his unusual enthusiasm in behalf of his convictions brought him into clash with the church authorities. The result was an indictment for heresy in 1911. Mr. Dietrich made no defense, being assured that he had entirely

outgrown the limitations of the evangelical Christian church, and so resigned. He was immediately invited by the officers of the Unitarian Association to enter that fellowship. He accepted and found himself settled at once as the minister of the Unitarian Society in Spokane, Washington. At this time Mr. Dietrich belonged to what might be called the theistic type of Unitarian; but during his ministry there he continued to develop in mind and soon found himself teaching a purely naturalistic religion. It is interesting to note that his audiences kept pace with his growth. When he went there he found himself speaking to about 40 people in a small and miserable building. Within three years this society was forced to move into a theater to accommodate those who wished to hear him speak, and before he left there he was addressing from 1,200 to 1,500 people every Sunday morning. He then came to Minneapolis as minister of the Unitarian Society. Here he found a well equipped building, but audiences of only about 100 people; but during his nine years here he has duplicated his Spokane experience, and meetings are now being held in a theater in order to accommodate the interested public. During this period he has become one of the leaders of what might be called the left wing of Unitarianism, preaching a purely naturalistic and humanistic religion, based upon the results of scientific inquiry as tested by human reason. He was recently invited by the Independent Religious Society of Chicago to succeed Mr. Mangasarian as its regular lecturer; but he decided to remain in Minneapolis where he sees an unusual opportunity for the kind of work to which he is devoting his life—the improvement of human life through the exercise of reason, the knowledge of truth, and the practice of right.

THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY OF MINNEAPOLIS

Its Background:

A man's religion is at any and every moment the expression of his inmost being. No church or society or other institution can express this for him. All they can do is to put forward ideals, aspirations, faiths, and theories, and hope that some or all of them may mould and qualify, nurture and develop, the inmost beings of those to whom they are presented. But these inmost beings go on developing, affected by the whole of the environment in which they move, and effecting it, while the churches stand still, weighed down by their age-long creeds and systems of theology.

The Unitarian Society puts forth a religion without creed or system of theology—a religion that in its very nature grows and develops, a religion therefore that can never be outgrown, but will inspire man and encourage him through all his long march. Its faith is a faith in man, in his capacity for continuous development in knowledge of the truth, in appreciation of the beautiful, and in love of the good; and in a universe which is not in conflict with the pursuit of these ideals. Its gospel is that a pursuit of these ideals is an assurance of their attainment, in spite of countless failures and disappointments.

Its Meaning:

The Unitarian Society of Minneapolis is an association of men and women interested in and devoted to the principles of liberal religion. Its main object is to promote a conception of nature, history, and the meaning of life in accordance with the facts of experience and with the progress of science and criticism. Naturally therefore it is opposed to traditional beliefs which interfere with free inquiry and it disputes all claims to supernatural enlightenment, holding that these

tend only to obscure the realities and prevent the reasonable ideals of life. It refuses to bind itself to any particular kind of philosophy, and insists that men's minds shall be open to the acceptance of all discovered truth, and that reason shall be untrammelled in its attempt to sift the true from the false.

It regards religion as moral enthusiasm, expressing itself in effort directed towards reform of abuses, pure ethical ideals, just social order, free economic conditions, and pacific international relations. It does not pretend to offer any final solution on these matters; but seeks to promote clear thinking, to quicken individual conviction, and to inspire earnest action, to the end that religion may effectively express itself in these directions.

Its Purpose:

The Unitarian Society of Minneapolis is a fellowship of men and women who are striving to supply to the community the essentials of an organized liberal religious life. It is based on the belief that religion is a vital element in human life, and that it reaches beyond theologies and sects and creeds. It believes that truth is the only authority, and that truth is attained by the struggle of the individual mind after reality, and not taught in the doctrines of an institution. Therefore it is not a sectarian organization, defending some statement of faith; but a fellowship of all those, irrespective of creed, who recognize the existence of a religious and moral force in human endeavor, and who desire to co-operate in the effort to make this force a power in the personal life of the individual as well as in the group life of the community.

The purpose of this society therefore is to help men and women to widen and deepen their religious experience, to aid them in substituting reason for tradition in their search for reality, to encourage them to

throw off the shakles of fear and put on the daring of real faith, to uphold them in trying to live according to their highest ideals, and to unite them in their efforts to increase in the world a recognition of the worth of human life, and of the ability of man to transform his social environment in proportion to his united endeavor.

Its Method:

This society holds regular services each Sunday morning at 10:30 o'clock in the Garrick Theater from September 15th to June 15th. These consist of songs, readings, a meditation, and an address by the minister. As songs the best lyric poetry of the world is set to the familiar old hymn tunes. The readings are from the literature of all ages and of all peoples. The meditation is a devotional attempt to contemplate the ideal of perfect truth, perfect justice, and perfect good will. The addresses seek to deal with the supreme things in life in a simple and plain manner. They take the widest survey of those questions which agitate the minds and engage the activities of men everywhere. Nothing that is human is alien to them. Without ceasing to be critical, they seek to be constructive. They do not pretend to offer any final conclusions on the matters discussed; but seek merely to promote clear thinking, to quicken individual conviction, and to inspire earnest action. In all these addresses it is understood that the speaker speaks for himself only, and commits nobody else. Freedom of speech for the speaker, and freedom of judgment for the hearer—that is the arrangement.

Its Organization:

The fundamental basis of the Unitarian organization is freedom. It believes that the goal of human progress can be approached only to the extent that men and women learn to think independently, fear-

lessly, and rationally; in proportion as mind and conscience become liberated from servile submission to authority and tradition. It assumes the right therefore of every one to think his own thoughts, and expects the greatest progress to follow from entire intellectual liberty and perfect freedom of judgment. It thus makes a universal appeal to mankind. Acknowledging the common religion embedded in every one of the historic faiths, yet recognizing the same common religion in those unable to subscribe to those faiths, it aims to be an association of all those who wish to co-operate in building a world which shall be enlightened by knowledge, guided by reason, and animated by good will.

Is It Religious?

The Unitarian movement is essentially religious, not in the traditional, but in the scientific and ethical sense of the word—religious because it is an earnest and constructive movement devoted to the service of man in all that makes for the elevation and realization of his ideals. It regards religion as spiritual enthusiasm, directing itself toward the enrichment of the individual life and the improvement of the social order. All forms of religion spring from the universal desire for beauty, goodness, and truth which reveal themselves in man's growing knowledge of his universe and in his own aspiring moral nature. The religion of this Society differs from that of most religious organizations in that it looks for its inspiration from within rather than from without. Its faith is in the divinity inherent in human nature. It believes that ample wisdom and virtue dwell within the nature of man himself, and moves forward to the accomplishment of the successive tasks of mankind on the basis of those truths which have been discovered by science, tested by reason, and approved by experience.

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